Accommodations Toolkit

Small Group and Individual Administration: Research

This fact sheet on **small group and individual administration** is part of the *Accommodations Toolkit* published by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). It summarizes information and research findings on small group and individual administration as accommodations.[1] The toolkit also contains a summary of states' accessibility policies for individual and small group administrations (/nceo/accommodations-toolkit/small-group-policies).

What is small group and individual administration?

Small group and individual administration are accessibility features or accommodations where students who are easily distracted, or whose assessment administration may distract others, are assessed in an alternate setting (e.g., separate room, in a room with a small group of students receiving the same accommodation, etc.). Small group and individual administration are often bundled with other accommodations (e.g., human read aloud, braille, sign language interpretation, extended time, etc.) (Cawthon et al., 2012; Davis, 2011; Noakes, 2017).

What are the research findings on who should use this accommodation? Research has shown that students who benefit from small group and individual accommodations include students who are deaf or hard of hearing (Cawthon, 2008), have learning disabilities (Cawthon et al, 2012), mild disabilities (Davis, 2011), traumatic brain injuries (Noakes, 2017), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Parks, 2009), and autism or related developmental disorders (Szarko, 2000). The accommodation can be used to support students' sensory needs, emotional needs, or to reduce distraction to other students caused by the provision of other accommodations that may be bundled with these accommodations. (Noakes, 2017).

What are the research findings on implementation of small group and individual administration? Five studies were located that addressed small group and individual administration.

- Four studies examined small group and individual administration for students with specific learning disabilities. These studies found that students with learning disabilities use accommodations, including small group and individual administration, to support the language demands in assessments (Cawthon et al, 2012; Davis, 2011; Parks, 2009; Pomplun & Omar, 2000).
- Two studies examined frequency-related topics for the small group and individual administration accommodations. Bolt (2004), in an analysis of state accommodation policies, found that individual and small group accommodations were amongst the most frequently allowed accommodations, while Cawthon (2008) found that the small group and individual assessment accommodations were among the most widely used accommodations by students who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Two studies (Bolt, 2004: Cawthon, 2008) concluded that small group and individual accommodations did not impact test validity. For example, Cawthon found that individual and small group testing did not significantly alter the assessment content or the cognitive demand for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Finizio (2008) studied the relationship between instructional and assessment accommodations on students' Individual Education Programs (IEPs). The study analyzed IEPs to determine if instructional accommodations and assessment accommodations were listed. The study found instructional accommodations on over 75% of the IEPs, and assessment accommodations on over 75% of IEPs. Overall, the study's found that the majority of small group and individual administration accommodations match for instruction and assessment.
- One study (Noakes, 2017) looked at the use of the speech-to-text accommodation for students with traumatic brain injuries and found that there was also a need for small group and individual testing. The use of these setting accommodations helped students focus attention on planning, composing, and editing their written work.

What perceptions do students and teachers have about small group and individual administration? Two research studies examined student and teacher perceptions about the use of small group and individual administration.

- Davis (2011) explored secondary general educators' level of knowledge about accommodations that allow students with mild disabilities to be successful in the general education setting. The study concluded that secondary general educators have a good understanding of when it is appropriate to use the small group and individual administration accommodations.

- Williams (2015), examined the experiences of middle school students when receiving test accommodations. The study looked at individual and small group settings, and the effects on students being removed from the regular classroom and tested in a separate setting. While the study found an increase in student comfort and understanding of material, the researchers also found that students had significant concern about the social stigma of being removed from the regular classroom.

What have we learned overall? Small group and individual administration accommodations are widely used and, in general, teachers are confident in how to provide these accommodations. Students who use these accommodations often use them in conjunction with other accommodations. However, some students do not like the small group and individual administration accommodations because they have the perception that there is a social stigma when they leave the regular classroom to go to a separate setting for the test administration. Prior to using the small group or individual administration accommodation, it is important to discuss it with the student to make sure that the student understands its purpose, and to problem solve any concerns the student may have.

There is limited research on small group and individual administration since these accommodations are often bundled with other accommodations. There is especially a need for additional research on students' perceptions of these accommodations, since they are widely used, yet students may have concerns about them, to identify better ways to implement them or possible alternatives to these accommodation (e.g., use text-to speech with headphones rather than a human reader so the student can take the assessment in the same room as other students). There is also a need for research on possible ways to successfully administer some other accommodations without bundling them with small group or individual administration.

Footnotes

[1]

Research on individual and small group administration summarized here is also available in NCEO's searchable *Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Bibliography* (https://nceo.info/Resources/bibliographies):://nceo.info/Resources/bibliographies (https://nceo.info/Resources/bibliographies)) and in NCEO syntheses of research from 1999 through 2019 (see summaries for: 1999-2001 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/TechReport34.pdf), 2002-2004 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tech45/Technical45.pdf), 2005-2006 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tech47/TechReport47.pdf), 2007-2008 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tech56/TechnicalReport56.pdf), 2009-2010 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tech65/TechnicalReport65.pdf), 2011-2012 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Synthesis94/Synthesis94.pdf), 2013-2014 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Report402/NCEOReport402.pdf), 2015-2016 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport412.pdf), 2017 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport418.pdf), 2018 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport423.pdf), 2019 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport433.pdf). See the reports and online bibliography for additional information about the criteria used to identify studies included in this fact sheet.

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